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Résumé de l'article

Cet article concerne la dimension éthique des recherches sur le terrain qu'a faites Franz Boas d'abord dans l'Arctique et ensuite sur la côte Nord-ouest de l'Amérique du Nord, ceci dans le contexte scientifique de l'époque. Dans l'Arctique, Boas s'est retenu de voler des tombes mais il a exploité «son appartenance à la race blanche» pour exercer des pressions sur «ses Esquimaux» afin de poursuivre ses buts scientifiques. Sur la côte Nord-ouest, il a changé d'attitude. Se passant de toute réflexion éthique, lui et ses collaborateurs ont profané des tombes à des fins scientifiques et financières. Il est vrai que Boas a été influencé dans plusieurs domaines par Kant, mais la position éthique de Kant restait en suspens quand Boas travaillait sur le terrain. Dans ses recherches sur le terrain, Boas n'a pas respecté l'être humain en tant que fin en soi. Il adhérait plutôt à un utilitarisme éthique et soutenait une forte distinction entre la science et l'éthique.

Assessing Franz Boas' ethics in his Arctic and later anthropological fieldwork

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Résumé: Évaluer la dimension éthique des recherches de Franz Boas dans l'Arctique et dans ses terrains anthropologiques subséquents

Cet article concerne la dimension éthique des recherches sur le terrain qu'a faites Franz Boas d'abord dans l'Arctique et ensuite sur la côte Nord-ouest de l'Amérique du Nord, ceci dans le contexte scientifique de l'époque. Dans l'Arctique, Boas s'est retenu de voler des tombes mais il a exploité «son appartenance à la race blanche» pour exercer des pressions sur «ses Esquimaux» afin de poursuivre ses buts scientifiques. Sur la côte Nord-ouest, il a changé d'attitude. Se passant de toute réflexion éthique, lui et ses collaborateurs ont profané des tombes à des fins scientifiques et financières. Il est vrai que Boas a été influencé dans plusieurs domaines par Kant, mais la position éthique de Kant restait en suspens quand Boas travaillait sur le terrain. Dans ses recherches sur le terrain, Boas n'a pas respecté l'être humain en tant que fin en soi. Il adhérait plutôt à un utilitarisme éthique et soutenait une forte distinction entre la science et l'éthique.

Abstract: Assessing Franz Boas' ethics in his Arctic and later anthropological fieldwork

This paper attempts to trace Franz Boas' ethics in his anthropological fieldwork in the Arctic and on the Northwest Coast within the scientific context of that time. In the Arctic, Boas refrained from grave robbery but "exploited his membership in the white race" and applied pressure on "his Eskimos" to secure his scientific goals. On the Northwest Coast, Boas changed his attitude: far from any ethical reflection, he and his collaborators desecrated graves for scientific and financial purposes. In many ways Boas was influenced by Kant, but in his field research Kant's ethical position remained eclipsed; Boas' practice in the field did not respect humans as an end in itself. Rather, Boas subscribed to an ethical utilitarianism and sustained a strong separation of science and ethics.

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> […] the small part of humanity that produced anthropology [is] the same that reduced so many other humans to becoming objects of contempt and disgust. Aftermath of colonialism: that is how our investigations are sometimes called (Lévi-Strauss 1992: 43).

Introduction

Franz Boas' interest in foreign cultures, which he had from childhood on, lead him to embark in June 1883 with his servant Wilhelm Weike on a voyage to the Inuit on Baffin Island, his "first and only field research among the Inuit" (Müller-Wille 1994a: 29). The undertaking was unique in several respects: first, because it was an expedition carried out by only one, or rather two, men; second, because it was self-financed, which is why Boas did not have to submit to alien interests and goals, political or otherwise; and lastly unique because in this Arctic region, "power relations were not yet structured by colonization and the work of missionaries" (Knötsch 1992: 68). Unique are also the method of participant observation that Boas practiced, the cartographic drawings that he had the Inuit in part produce themselves and in which place names were being captured in Inuktitut[1]. Boas' writings on Inuit language, mythology, religion, history, geography and economy serve the Inuit to this day as "a cultural and historical source for the continued development of their own culture and language, […] since they represent how their ancestors were thinking and living before the all-encompassing influence of Christian missionaries and Canadian government institutions" (Müller-Wille 1994a: 34).

Boas' fieldwork among the Inuit: Theory and practice

Boas' participation in the life of the Inuit will move him to the statement that he himself "is now like an Eskimo," for, as he says, "[…] I live like them, hunt with them and count myself among the men of Anarnitung" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1994b: 186). Even though he claims that the stay in Baffin Island did not affect his personality[2], it nevertheless initiated Boas into a different understanding of ethnology and anthropology. Participant observation provided the first case in point not only for his later critique of the so-called comparative method in ethnology and anthropology, but also for his theory of cultural relativism, later expressed and justified in scientific terms: On December 23, 1883, he notes in his diary:

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1 Boas thereby distanced himself from Eurocentric colonial claims to sovereignty, which often found their expression in the re-naming of discovered and conquered territories. The prefix "New" proved the most powerful module of this geographic baptism (e.g., New Amsterdam, New England, etc.); it enabled the Europeans "to clone their own world semantically and to appropriate far away and foreign parts through the lexical return of the same" (Sloterdijk 1999: 928).

2 "I know I will be the same as when I left [Germany]. What I have seen and experienced here has not changed me, perhaps made me a little more sensitive to all the beauty and goodness that is to be found at home, and I also take a greater pleasure in associating with others than formerly" (Boas in Cole 1983: 45).

> I often ask myself what advantages our "good" society possesses over the "savages" and the more I see of their customs, I find that we really have no grounds to look down on them contemptuously […]. I believe that if this trip has a significant impact on me as a thinking person, then it is the strengthening of my notion of the relativity of all education and the conviction that the value of people lies in the guidance close to their heart [*Herzensbildung*], which I find, or miss here, just as at home […] (Boas in Müller-Wille 1998: 159).

Although Boas never returned to Baffin Island, he ended his narrative *A Year Among the Eskimos* with the emotional words:

> After all the many little adventures, and after a long and intimate intercourse with the Eskimos, it was with feelings of sorrow and regret that I parted from my Arctic friends. I had seen that they enjoyed life, and a hard life, as we do; that nature is also beautiful to them; that feelings of friendship also root in the Eskimo heart; that, although, the character of their life is so rude as compared to civilized life, the Eskimo is a man as we are; that his feelings, his virtues, and his shortcomings are based in human nature, like ours (Boas 1887 in Stocking 1974: 55).

Boas' first ethnological fieldwork on Baffin Island without doubt stood under the sign of pure science, since only "he serves humanity and has not lived in vain," whose efforts "lie in furthering truth"—whether it be "sweet or bitter for humanity" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1994b: 161). But living with the Inuit seems to have inspired Boas to formulate an ethical and political imperative for living, which goes beyond the demands of science. In January 1884, he writes to his fiancée Marie Krackowizer from Baffin Island: "What I want to live and die for, is equal rights for all, equal possibilities to learn and work for poor and rich alike! Don't you think that when one has done even a little towards this, this is more than the whole of science together?" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1998: 171). One might ask then, whether Boas indeed managed to live according to this self-imposed ethico-political principle and to integrate it with the practical activities of field research in the Arctic region and later, on the Canadian Northwest Coast, whenever he was in direct contact with his "objects of study."

The stay in Baffin Island confronted Boas with a multitude of problems: boredom, loneliness, hunger, cold, awkward and dangerous travelling conditions and other privations. Suffering and fear as well as a longing for home were his permanent companions; three times he writes the same quote from Homer into his Baffin Island diary: "Even as I yield freely to thee, yet unwilling" (*ibid*.: 131). At his arrival the Inuit accorded him special status, that of a great physician, a *Doktoraaluk*. "They come so trustingly to the Doktoraluk [*sic*], as I am called here, yet I can do nothing" (*ibid*.). Again and again he was called to a sick bed and yet could not help. Boas occasionally felt the pinch of his conscience about the unjustified status attributed to him[3], but he did nothing to change it. Rather, when diphtheria was spreading and some Inuit suspected him to be the cause of the disease and would neither offer him to come into their tent nor loan or sell him their dogs, he worked with all his power to resist a change in role

3 On November 18, 1883, Boas wrote to his parents: "You can't imagine how the awareness that I cannot help these poor people weighs heavily on me, yet what is the point, I cannot do anything" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1998: 141).

assignment. Under these circumstances Boas played up his power, and "readily exploits his membership in the white race and uses denial of important objects of exchange as a means to apply pressure" (Knötsch 1992: 61). Since he knew that the leader of the conspiracy against him, the shaman Napekin, had only a bad rifle and hardly any ammunition and was planning a longer journey, Boas threatened to break off relations completely: "He [Napekin] is taking the same trip that I am taking this summer and I let him know that he would get nothing from me, even if I saw him starving before my eyes [*sic*], if he did not first come to me and ask me into his iglu" (Cole 1983: 38; Knötsch 1992: 60).

That the strategy was successful in the end is shown by a diary entry from February 19, 1884: "I will suffer seriously from the sicknesses that are prevailing here […] Now none of them wanted to lend me any dogs, but when I asked for them they did not dare refuse" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1998: 185). Obviously, when confronted by circumstances which were certainly not life-threatening but would have curtailed his scientific efforts, Boas refused to act according to his ethical principle of "equal rights for all." In this context his interactions with his servant Wilhelm Weike also prove illuminating: Weike called Boas always "Herr Doktor" but it remains unclear whether this was done on Boas' demand or not. It is significant, however, that Boas gave his servant *Don Quichote* as a birthday gift (*ibid.*: 144). Boas displayed the same patronising and contemptuous attitude with regard to his closest collaborator in the Canadian Northwest Coast, George Hunt (Cole 1985: 156).

Boas' presumption and vanity were not always successful like in 1907 when holding the chair for anthropology at Columbia University, he seemingly wrote a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt about the work of photographer Edward Curtis. Roosevelt admired and supported Curtis, whose mission in life was to visit and take pictures of every North American Native Indian culture still in existence. Boas' letter expressed doubts as to the value of his work, since Curtis did not hold an academic degree and was not qualified for ethnological research. Roosevelt promptly created a commission, which found unanimously that Curtis had the necessary qualifications (Curtis Graybill and Bosen 1979: 37).

On the other hand, Boas' strategy largely succeeded in his subsequent research trips to the tribes of the Canadian Northwest Coast, as well as it had on Baffin Island. In 1886, when Boas was invited to a potlatch by the Nuwitti Kwakiutl and had to give a speech, he emphasized his status as a "chief"—which was how he had been introduced to the Nuwitti[4]—as follows: "My country is far from yours; much further even than that of the Queen. The commands of the Queen do not affect me. I am a chief and no one may command me. I alone determine what I am to do" (Rohner 1969: 33). Two days later Boas held his own potlatch in exchange for a dance the Nuwitti had performed for him. With that Boas secured their trust and created a basis for buying their masks and

4 Boas relates the introduction on October 9, 1886, in a letter-diary to his parents: "'This chief', he said, pointing at me, 'has come to us from a distant land, and all our hearts are glad. He is not like the other whites who have come to us. His heart is pure and kind toward us Indians'" (Rohner 1969: 37).

blankets cheaply. In the following years on the Northwest Coast, Boas used the same trick again and again. In 1897 he writes in a letter to his parents: "I have employed my oft-used trick: inviting all the Indians to a feast" (*ibid*.: 235).

Boas and the scientific spirit of the time

In October 1882, before starting his journey to Baffin Island, Boas went to Berlin to expand his knowledge of cartography, linguistics, meteorology and photography. Under the guidance of Rudolf Virchow he acquired techniques in physical anthropology, *i.e*. how to make somatological measurements. He continued to admire the scientist Virchow for the rest of his life. His epitaph for Virchow published in the journal *Science* (1902) ends with the following words: "With profound admiration and gratitude we regard his life's work, which has determined the course of a new science" (Stocking 1974: 41). Rudolf Virchow, icon of German pathology and the most influential member of the German Anthropological Society founded in 1870, accumulated an enormous collection of skulls and skeletons, and with his scientific zeal, all means that furthered this goal were deemed permissible[5].

But the one to instigate grave robbery publicly in the name of science was the "Napoléon" of French science of his days: George Cuvier (1769-1832). He encouraged travellers to collect skeletons or at least parts of skeletons of foreign "races"; ideally they were to bring back skulls, since the shape of the skull would demonstrate the degree of intelligence; he also gave precise instructions on how to dissolve flesh from the bone and more (Stocking 1968: 30). Otis Mason, a one time "scientific rival" to Franz Boas and the first curator of the National Museum for Ethnology in Washington, D.C., worked along similar lines when he called upon workers and especially on soldiers staying in war zones, to collect objects of ethnological relevance (Hinsley 1981: 87). American and European ethnology and anthropology of the time obeyed one fundamental imperative, namely: to salvage what could be salvaged! This was the spirit in which the physician Samuel Morton (1799-1851), who had attended lectures on phrenology[6] at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, set out to hunt for "Indian" skulls along the Ohio and Mississippi. At the time of his death his collection encompassed approximately 1,000 specimens (Hinsley 1981: 26). With his work *Crania Americana*, published in 1839, he became the "father of American physical anthropology" (Bieder 1986: 60) and the founder of the "American School of Anthropology." Morton's work supplied the empirical basis for the polygenistic argument, which denied the Biblical dogma of the unity of human species and

5 Virchow remarked to a very religious weaver who had brought the body of his stillborn child to Virchow's Pathological Institute and asked to have it back for burial when the promised reward did not materialize, that it would be easier to find his child after resurrection in the collection of the Pathological Institute than if it were "buried deeply under ground" (Matyssek 2001: 160).

6 Phrenology originated with the German physician Franz Joseph Gall (1825) who thought that the mind consisted of 37 different faculties which could be measured in their corresponding locations on the cranium. Although he did not apply phrenology to differentiate human "races," his followers did (Harris 1968: 99).

scientifically legitimated slavery in America[7].

To this school belonged among others, George Gliddon and the Southern physician Josiah Nott, who called his research "niggerology." This "School of American Anthropology" received massive scientific backing by the Swiss natural scientist and zoologist Louis Agassiz, at the time a teacher at Harvard, who was convinced that "the brain of the Negro is that of the imperfect brain of a 7 month's infant in the womb of the white." Agassiz, too, repeatedly called upon the war ministry for the provisioning of Indian cadavers for his Museum of Natural History in Cambridge, MA: "[...] I should like one or two handsome fellows entire and the heads of two or three more" (Bieder 1986: 91-92). For Morton and Agassiz the Indian was a "zoological specimen," and their lack of scruple "helped to sanction the activities of those who in the name of science travelled to the West to collect crania for phrenological purposes and for museums" (Bieder 1986: 101).

The demand of museums and anatomical and anthropological institutes in the 19th and 20th century[8] for dead "human material" was immense. People violated ethical and religious boundaries without a second thought, ignoring completely the meaning the dead of a supposedly primitive culture might hold for the living. That only a dead Indian is a good Indian, was well understood even before General Sheridan made his famous statement to the Comanche Tosawi (Brown 1974: 172). A dead Indian, whose remains could be dug up and made available to science, was, especially in the 19th century, an even better Indian[9].

His studies with Rudolf Virchow and Adolf Bastian, Germany's premier representative of the "salvage ethnology," as well as the reigning scientific climate had a decisive influence on Franz Boas and his ethnological field research with the Inuit and the peoples of the Northwest Coast. On September 30, 1883, on the island Arilik Boas and his company found, probably not wholly by accident, skulls in a chest under a big stone as well as a grave site: "The corpse in the chest, but no skull attached, wrapped in blue cloth [...]. Apparently very old" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1994b: 107). On October 10, Boas discovered three grave sites close by Alikun and notes: "Unfortunately I can't take the skulls that we found in two of the graves, because of my Eskimos." That same evening Boas wrote a letter to his father Meier Boas, in which he regretted one more time that he was unable to take them along: "I would have liked to

7 The proponents of polygenitism argued not only in scientific but also religious terms for the inferiority of the "coloured races." They called the latter "Pre-Adamites," because they were to have been created together with the animals on the fifth day, which was why their progeny, just like animals, was unable to distinguish between good and evil (Bitterli 1991: 329). Against this argument, Boas published the German version of his book *The Mind of Primitive Man* under the title *Das Geschöpf des Sechsten Tages* ('Creature of the Sixth Day').

8 Until the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), many Aboriginal burial grounds continued to be excavated by archaeologists of various universities. As Deloria (1996: 43) cynically put it, "grave desecration became a leisure activity for the summertime."

9 "About biology, it is clear that scientific rationality produces the distinction between living/non-living on which biology is founded [...]. Analogous to the only good Indian, there is only one good (scientific) object, namely a dead one" (Baudrillard 1982: 240).

take the skulls that were covered in moss and lichen, but I did not dare do it because that would have offended the Eskimos seriously. So I had to paddle on without saying anything about my find [*sic*]" (Boas in Müller-Wille 1994b: 118). This makes abundantly clear, that the Inuit strictly forbade grave robbery and that Boas did not dare spoil his relations with them: he was aware of his dependency on the Inuit, especially concerning travel. But Boas' statement of having kept the find secret from "his Eskimos," is illuminating: possibly done in the hope to return to the place one day without the Inuit and steal the skulls? Even though Boas reports that Hannibal Jack, one of the Inuit, brought him "some bones" (Müller-Wille 1994b: 167), in all likelihood Boas respected the interdiction of grave robbery on Baffin Island. If he had taken skulls and skeletons, he would have been hard pressed to keep it secret; moreover, Boas' Inuit collection, which went to the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, contained neither skulls nor skeletons—this would have been certainly documented.

Boas and the desecration of graves on the Northwest Coast

Boas modified his attitude with regard to grave robbery on subsequent field research trips to the peoples of the Northwest Coast. Either by himself or through George Hunt and other intimates, without scruple or shame, he took skulls and skeletons from graves in the name of science and in the name of profitability. He sacrificed his ethical imperative for science and not least for personal financial gain. Hence he noted in 1886 immediately after his arrival in Victoria, the point of departure for the first field research trip to the Northwest: "I am glad to be finally working at something worthwhile and new, because I became tired of the Eskimo" (Rohner 1969: 22). "New" will be language, mythology and manner of living; "worthwhile," the sacred and profane objects, which Boas himself or others in his name bought and later sold: masks, rattles, blankets, totem poles, and, finally, skeletal remains.

Already on November 9, 1886, Boas stole "two well preserved skulls" from an "old burial ground" in Cowichan (Rohner 1969: 57), and on November 15 he notes, "today I found something worthwhile [*sic*]: a very old well-preserved skull [...]. I hope to find more tomorrow" (*ibid.*: 60). During the following research trips to the Northwest Coast, which Boas carried out from 1888 to 1894 for the most part on behalf of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, but also for the Bureau of American Ethnology and, in 1894, also for the American Museum of Natural History, he intensified his activities with regard to grave robbery considerably. Although Horatio Hale, who directed Boas' research in 1888, asked him to work up a "general synopsis of the ethnology of the whole of British Columbia according to the linguistic stock" as well as to carry out "anthropometric measurements of the different tribes" (Hale in Rohner 1969: 81), Boas accumulated primarily for financial gain a substantial collection of skulls.

Admittedly, Boas found it "very unpleasant work to steal bones from a grave," but his justification that "someone has to do it" is far from an ethical reflection and much more in accord with the spirit of the time. On June 6, 1888, he wrote: "We discovered

that someone had stolen all the skulls, but we found a complete skeleton without head. [...] Yesterday I wrote to the museum in Washington asking whether they would consider buying skulls this winter for $600; if they will, I shall collect assiduously. Without having such a connection I would not do it. [...] I dreamed of skulls and bones all last night. I dislike very much working with this stuff; i.e. collecting it, not the having of it" (Rohner 1969: 88). Boas learned that James and William Sutton had a large collection of skulls. He was able to look at them and after spending a day "frantically" making anthropometrical measurements of about 75 skulls, found them to be "very instructive" (*ibid*.: 89). In the end, Boas would acquire the collection for the United States National Museum in Washington D.C. In the following weeks Boas kept going on "expeditions"—as he himself called them—to hunt for skulls and skeletons and noted: "Besides having scientific value these skeletons are worth money" (*ibid*.: 90). Boas also asked acquaintances and friends to collect skulls on his behalf and at times he used ignorant bystanders for purposes of camouflage. Thus he managed to persuade a photographer to visit an Indian village on the Skeena River and to photograph the inhabitants while he went hunting for skulls. "I wanted him to do this in order to distract their attention [...]. Of course I did not tell the photographer (a stuttering idiot) what I wanted until we were there. I took a skull and the entire lower portion of the man" (*ibid*.: 95).

Boas' interest in skulls on the Northwest Coast had also a scientific nature. His anthropometric measurements afforded him "an insight into this subject about which up to now I knew little" (*ibid*.) and he came to the unexpected result that "the examination of these skulls shows that the individual tribes, speaking the same language, vary considerably from one another" (*ibid*.: 89). From then on Boas was tireless in his criticism of the scientific idea of "pure race" and distanced himself clearly from the supposedly scientific insights of phrenology. About the Sutton brothers, who also practiced phrenology besides their business of collecting and selling skulls, he wrote: "Of course I refrained from saying anything about the nonsense of phrenology" (*ibid*.: 96).

Although Boas wrote to his wife Marie on July 10, 1888, that he was glad to be done with the digging up of graves, because "it's an ugly job," on July 13, he nevertheless walked around all the Indian burial grounds in Lytton to collect bones, but found "nothing of great value" (*ibid*.: 99). His subsequent field trips to the Northwest in the years 1889 and 1890 are also undeniably linked to grave robbery and the buying of skulls. In 1890 he expressed his worry that he might have to sell his collection of skulls due to a financial crisis, although it would be "wiser" to keep it, since "it will gain in value." At the same time he hoped to complete the collection because "some doctors" promised him a few skulls which led him to estimate the value of his collection at $1,800 (*ibid*.: 130). Hence the Sutton brothers dug after skeletons and skulls while in his employ: Boas paid $20 for a complete skeleton and $5 for a skull. The collected "objects" the Sutton brothers sent were "invoiced with a falsified origin and labelled as natural history specimens" to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where Boas stored them. By then Boas was in possession of about 200 crania, 100 of which belonged to complete skeletons (Cole 1985: 120-121).

Boas as "circus impresario"

Boas sold a part of the skull collection to Virchow for the Berlin Museum, but the larger part of the Vancouver skulls were "systematically displayed in glass cases among other cranial examples" (Cole 1985: 132) at the 1893 Chicago World Fair in the physical anthropology section which was under Boas' direction. Frederic W. Putnam, the director of the Peabody Museum in Harvard, was in charge of the so-called Anthropological Building. The World Columbian Exposition in Chicago had elected evolution as its scientific theme. The goal was to demonstrate the superiority of the white race and the victory of modern civilisation[10]. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was not allowed within the terrain of the exposition because it lacked scientificity (Moses 1996: 133). Yet, the status accorded to the "savages" on display became clear from the argument Putnam put forward to the Canadian Pacific Railway company: the Kwakiutl should "be returned free like other exhibits, as they were exhibits in every sense of the term" (Cole 1985: 133).

Among Boas' tasks were keeping up a correspondence with teachers, missionaries, and other administrators to initiate anthropometric measurements on 90,000 American school children and 17,000 Native Indians (*ibid*.: 122). In the Anthropological Building, visitors could have themselves measured and investigated by physical anthropologists under Boas' supervision (Rydell 1984: 57). Boas was also charged with displaying "life objects lessons," which is why he tasked George Hunt to bring not only a complete Kwakiutl house and about 365 sacred objects from the winter ceremonies of every secret Kwakiutl society, but also 14 adult Kwakiutl to Chicago (Cole 1985: 124, 126). All that, according to Putnam, should bring the visitors (and there were after all 27 millions of them) face to face with the "stages of development of man on the American continent" (Putnam in Hoxie 2001: 88). The Native Indians on display, as explained Putnam, would be given the rare opportunity "to see and understand the relations of different nations and the material advances which civilization brings to mankind" (Putnam in Rydell 1984: 63).

The modest success of the anthropological display, the public critique from the *New York Times* of the hair-raising performances of the Kwakiutl, as well as internal problems with the Kwakiutl due to excessive alcohol consumption made Boas swear to "never again play the circus impresario" (Cole 1985: 133). Before he left Chicago in disappointment— he unsuccessfully applied for the position as curator of the Chicago Field Museum—he sold to this very museum after longer negotiations his anthropological collection of skeletons for $2,800 (Cole 1985: 169).

Yet Boas' desire for skulls and skeletons persisted. In winter of 1894, he had the rare opportunity to participate in the religious winter ceremonies of the Kwakiutl. Moved and impressed, he describes an initiation ceremony of the Hamatsa secret society: "The Hamatsa danced ahead of her, and after a while he took the skulls out of

10 This "Congress of Evolution" "synthesized and validated the theory of racial and material progress along evolutionary lines that the exposition itself presented in visible form" (Rydell 1985: 68).

her hands and put them down after he had licked them [...] The people were afraid to let me see this" (Boas in Rohner 1969: 188). Even though Boas realised the social and religious function and significance of the skulls, three days later he went again with George Hunt on one of his "skull expeditions." "An Indian came our way, however, so we could not do much. I tried again in the afternoon, but this time a Hamatsa came and I had to give up. So I still don't have them. But something has to be done about it!" The next day, December 3, Boas notes: "In the evening George and I went out again to get some skulls" (Rohner 1969: 189).

Boas and the dogma of salvage ethnology

By January 1, 1896, Boas had become Assistant Curator of Ethnology and Somatology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which under the directorship of Morris K. Jesup set out "to be a major player in American anthropology" (Cole 1999: 185). Jesup financed and organized a five-year expedition into the Northwest Coast under the scientific leadership of Boas, which resulted in the collection of a total of "6,626 ethnographic artifacts and 1,896 physical anthropological specimens" for that museum (Cole 1999: 154). The goal of this ambitious enterprise was "an investigation of the historical relations of the tribes to their neighbors" as well as "a presentation of the culture as it appears to the Indian himself" (Boas in Rohner 1969: 199). It remains questionable how these lofty goals could be reconciled with the uninhibited accumulation of artefacts, skulls and skeletons and the methods Boas used. Under the cover of the anthropological dogma of "salvaging what can be salvaged," Boas had his staff gather everything from human skulls to the most profane objects of everyday use for the museum.

At the beginning of the Jesup Expedition, Boas gave George Hunt money to hold a feast for the Kwakiutl of Fort Rupert. At this feast, Hunt was to read to the invited Indians a letter in which Boas praised himself as a tireless advocate against the anti-potlatch law (of 1885), regretted the fact that many of the young Kwakiutl neglected their own history and legends, and suggested that the children should keep legends and laws in a box, so that they should not be lost. The letter ended with the following proposal: "Friends, it would be good if my friend, George Hunt, would become the storage box of your laws and your stories" (Cole 1985: 158). Hunt was ordered to collect myths as well as skeletons and skulls, but—this was Boas' primary concern in 1897—under no circumstances was he to work for the anthropologist George Dorsey of the Field Museum of Chicago, the primary competitor to the New York museum. Both Dorsey and Boas had asked the well-known and successful collector C.F. Newcombe to gather skulls and skeletons for them. Boas told Newcombe that, "the more you let me have, the better," because skulls and skeletons were "always welcome" in New York, but added, "do not do as Dorsey did" (*ibid.*: 154). Dorsey, namely, had unscrupulously plundered graves and had been arrested a short time for grave desecration. Boas, with "evident delight at his rival's discomfiture and a measure of self-congratulation" wrote to Newcombe that he himself had plundered hundreds of graves, but had "never come into conflict with the feelings of Indians" (*ibid.*: 175-176). Boas refrained from

mentioning, however, that his collaborators, the Sutton brothers, George Hunt and Harlan Smith, operating in his pay and under his orders, had rather seriously violated the "feelings" of the Indians with their grave robberies (*ibid*: 158).

It is without doubt true that Boas saw the potlatch as a valuable and necessary institution of the cultural life of the Kwakiutl. He countered accusations of cannibalism and prostitution that had been raised in connection with the potlatch system by Indian agents and missionaries in 1897 in an open letter with the argument that the sudden abolition of potlatch would mean the "complete demoralization" of the Kwakiutl business system (Cole and Chaikin 1990: 130). However, against missionaries who publicly exposed Hunt's grave robbing activities, Boas wrote to the superintendent for Indian Affairs that it was justified to take the remains of people whose identity and relations were "no longer known." Superintendent Vowell agreed, "as long as the skeletons were neither cared for not claimed by any Indian," and with this George Hunt received an official permission to collect skulls and skeletons for Boas and the American Museum of Natural History (Cole 1985: 156).

Boas and the "Copernican turn"

In his position as assistant curator for Ethnology Boas initiated a series of events, which also had an "air of ruthlessness" (Cole 1999: 210). In 1897 he wrote a letter to Robert Peary with the urgent request to bring a "middle-aged Eskimo" to New York, since "this would enable us to obtain leisurely [*sic*] certain information which will be of greatest scientific importance" (Boas in Harper 2000: 25). Robert Peary, seafarer, polar explorer, business man, hunter of meteorites and skeletons[11], who later reached the North Pole with "his Eskimos," as he loved to put it, sent by the end of September of the same year six Inuit from Northern Greenland to the American Museum of Natural History.

Overwhelmed by six new arrivals, the museum created emergency living quarters in the cellar. Some visitors were allowed to catch glimpses of the foreigners from up North. But in general, they were not displayed publicly, since they meant to serve primarily as study objects for the museum's scientific staff. Under Boas' supervision, the then young anthropologist Alfred Kroeber was given the unique opportunity to carry out field research, not in the foreign lands of the "savages," but on his own familiar terrain. Kroeber's scientific observations and collected information were published as *The Eskimo of Smith Sound* in 1899 (Harper 2000: 36).

All the Inuit caught pneumonia shortly after their arrival in New York; four died within the year, one was lucky enough to be allowed to return to Greenland and the youngest among them, the 7 year old Minik, stayed pending further decisions in New

11 In 1896 Peary was busy digging up skulls and skeletons of Greenlanders who had been killed in epidemics, some of whom he knew by name, in order to sell them to the American Museum of Natural History (Harper 2000: 69).

York. In February 1898, Qisuk, father of Minik, died in Bellevue Hospital in New York. Immediately a dispute started among the hospital, Peary and the museum, about who should get his corpse. They finally agreed that the hospital should do the autopsy and then deliver the skeleton to the museum. The same happened with the remains of the other three Greenlanders with Boas very likely playing a central role in the negotiations (ibid.: 90)[12].

Alfred Hrdlicka, the physical anthropologist of the Smithsonian Institution, also was allowed to study a "Polar Eskimo." In 1901 he published an article with the title *An Eskimo Brain* and the introductory words, "The brain in question is that of Qisuk [...]" (*ibid*.: 92). The orphaned Minik, however, did not know anything about all this, since the team of scientists of the museum had staged a bizarre mock funeral. The adoptive father of Minik, William Wallace, recalled the incident on April 21, 1909, in the *Evening Mail*: "That night some of us gathered on the museum grounds by order of the scientific staff, and got an old log about the length of a human corpse. This was wrapped in cloth, a mask attached to one end of it and all was in readiness. Dusk was the time chosen for the mock burial [...]. The funeral party knew the act must be accomplished quickly and quietly, so about the time the lights began to flare up Minik was taken out on the grounds, where the imitation body was placed [...]. The things worked well. The boy never suspected […]" (*ibid*.: 87-88).

In 1909 Boas confirmed to a journalist the course of this fictitious funeral but saw in this production "nothing particularly deserving severe criticism." He defended the right of the museum to the skeleton of Qisuk among others with the following remark: "Minik was just a little boy, and he did not ask for the body. If he had, he might have got it" (*ibid*.: 88-89). The fact is that when Minik found out about the fraud in 1906, and decided to return with his father's bones to Greenland, all his attempts to regain them from the museum failed. The museum simply denied having them. To be sure, Boas was no longer an employee of the museum at that time. The bones of Qisuk and three other Inuit were stored in the American Museum of Natural History in a box "under accession number 99/3610" until they were finally ceremoniously taken to Greenland and buried there in 1993. Precisely one hundred years after their arrival in New York a memorial plaque was affixed above their graves in the presence of the Danish Queen (*ibid*.: 225-228).

Even granting that Boas might have written his disastrous request to Peary with the best (scientific) intentions, it is still strange that he remained unconcerned after the experience at the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, where Inuit from Labrador were exhibited along with others and several of them died (*ibid*.: 94). In fact, even in a 1904 letter to William McGee, the anthropologist of the Smithsonian Bureau of

12 In 1899 an 11 year old girl from Alaska died in New York. Boas arranged the transportation of the body to the museum and reported to Jesup: "Little Eskimo girl died in Mt. Vernon. I have secured skeleton. $15" (Harper 2000: 96).

Ethnology and director of the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition[13], Boas promised to bring several Inuit for the planned ethnological display (Rydell 1984: 272). But these plans did not materialise and Boas ended up giving a lecture in St. Louis, which was later published under the title *The History of Anthropology*.

It also remains questionable whether Boas had not heard of the fate of the eight Labrador Inuit hired in 1880 by Johann Adrian Jacobsen for the Hamburg animal trader and zoo director Carl Hagenbeck and measured anthropometrically by Virchow. The Labrador Inuit died within half a year since Jacobsen neglected to have them immunized against smallpox (Lutz 2005: 67-86). Boas, of course, knew Jacobsen as well as Hagenbeck and his exhibits of Native "objects." In 1886 he had visited the Zoological Garden in Berlin and seen Hagenbeck's exhibition together with Virchow. He even wrote an enthusiastic article for the *Berliner Tagesblatt* on January 25 about the dances of the exhibited Bella Coola and Virchow, for his part, carried out anthropometrical measurements on them (Haberland 1999: 337-373).

With respect to the events around Minik, Harper (2000: 94) has rightly asked: "Was this fieldwork when the field was brought to the scientists?" The way in which Boas changed the manner of research, and the ethnological displays staged at the beginning of the 20th century in Europe and America, suggest a "Copernican turn." Copernicus executed his turn "after the explanation of the heavenly motions did not make good progress while he assumed that the whole army of stars turned around the observer" (Kant 1977a: 25) by shifting to the assumption that the observer, not the stars, were turning. Kant executed a turn insofar as he assumed that our apperception does not orient itself on objects, but that we prescribe to nature laws based on our intuitions of time and space and our a priori categories of understanding. Anthropology and ethnology executed a turn, then, insofar as one no longer necessarily had to go off to alien geographical and cultural spaces; instead one could bring them into one's own familiar terrain to study, measure, or just stare at them, at one's leisure.

Discussion: Franz Boas, science and ethics

Boas read and studied Kant on Baffin Island: "I have my Kant with me and am studying him so that I shall not be too uneducated when I come home [...] You have no concept of the effect of deprivation and hunger on a person. Perhaps Kant is a good antidote!" (Müller-Wille 1998: 154). In the same vein Boas states that Kant's thought is "a powerful means for guarding students from falling into a shallow materialism or positivism" (Cole 1999: 125). Kant's epistemological approach doubtlessly influenced Boas (Tilg and Pöhl 2007: 553f); Kant's ethical position, however, remained eclipsed in Boas' field research. Kant's deontological ethics, which states that any ethical action

13 The Louisiana Purchase exhibition was supposed to become the largest exhibition of anthropological and ethnological "curiosities," From the snake dance of the Hopis to the "tribe of marvelous boomerang throwers" (Moses 1996: 156ff) and the "Philippine Reservation," which displayed about 1200 Natives people of the Philippines (Rydell 1985:167ff), visitors could see all there was to be seen.

must be guided by the principle that humans are never means to an end, but always ends in themselves—because they possess dignity—cannot be reconciled with grave robbery, the desecration of burial grounds and turning people into spectacles. Viewed from an ethical philosophical perspective, Boas instead subscribed to utilitarianism: good is what is useful—useful for science, and sometimes also just useful for Boas himself. "Every man has his price, for which he gives himself away," says Kant (1977b: 688).

Like Kant and generally like all thinkers of Enlightenment, Boas, too, believed in the accomplishments of enlightened rationality and the progress associated with it. It was to reduce existing prejudices and assure that "the number of thinkers who try to free themselves from the fetters of tradition increases" (Boas in Cole 1999: 277). In some respect, however, Boas himself was not able to break away from the scientific spirit of the time and some of its dogmas, like the one about "salvaging what can be salvaged." But he managed to gradually distance himself from the evolutionary paradigm and its scientific racism despite the reigning anthropological tradition of his time[14]. Lévi-Strauss, who is in some respect a follower of Boas, remarks in this context that the "critique of racism [...] has its origin with Boas" (Lévi-Strauss 1996: 62).

Very much in the spirit of Enlightenment was Boas' optimistic belief in humanitarian progress which could only be assured under the condition of increasing rationality, which in turn requires freedom. Freedom for Boas was not only freedom of the will, but especially scientific freedom as a guarantor of humanitarian progress. Freedom in science, however, brings its own dangers, which is why Boas could violate ethical boundaries in the name of science. This is also why, but in inverse direction, Native people of the Great Antilles could conceive of the plan "to bury the bodies of drowned white prisoners to observe whether they were subject to decay" (Lévi-Strauss 1992: 370). The latter plan, though, had been conceived in reaction to the "scientific" investigative commission of the Spaniards, who were supposed to explore whether Native people possessed souls. The "ethical-political choice, that we have to make every day," says Foucault, must consist in "determining what the main danger is"; at the same time "everything is dangerous, which is not the same as being evil" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1994: 268).

It appears that Boas' conviction and fight for freedom of science implies a "dangerous" separation of science and ethics. The ethically indefensible consequences of this attitude manifest themselves first and foremost in his field research in the Canadian Northwest. On the other hand, such a separation can certainly be defended on ethical grounds. In 1922 Boas argued in reaction to laws for the sterilisation of epileptics and criminals that had been ratified in the state of New York: "It might be questioned whether the interest of humanity will be better served by eliminating all

14 As noted by Cole (1999: 168), in *Human Faculty as Determined by Race (*1894) Boas writes that there is no specific difference between supposedly superior and inferior races. All differences can be explained by the cultural and historical context, which is why one cannot assert that some races are unable to reach higher degrees of civilisation. For Cole (*ibid*.: 169), this is "a cautious and tepid beginning for his later crusade against racism."

abnormal strains which, as history shows, have produced a number of great men who have contributed to the best that mankind has done, or by carrying the burden of the unfit for the sake of the few valuable individuals that may spring from them. These, of course, are not scientific questions [*sic*], but social and ethical problems" (Boas 1982[1940]: 46).

According to Lévi-Strauss (1992: 43), anthropology and its practitioners are an attempt at redressing the balance in the "aftermath" of colonialism that accompanied the Renaissance. Only after anthropology and especially "occidental man started to comprehend that he will never comprehend himself as long as even one [...] single people is treated as an object, [...] can anthropology become what it properly is: an undertaking that renews the Renaissance and repays its debt" (*ibid*.). In the final reckoning Boas has essentially contributed to that goal.

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